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ABSTRACT

Personnel decisions in complex organizations must be made with no final guide other than one's own subjective pattern of person perceptions. From a series of studies an attempt is made to extricate from school principals the perceptual structures that appear to have guided their personnel decisions. The characteristics that they attribute to strong or weak staff members are found to correspond to their positions on four dimensions of perceptual behavior: complexity-simplicity, explicitness, decision dominance, and role assumption. Interestingly, leadership style was quick to reveal which priorities the principals used in determining which teachers are good teachers. Cultural differences are apparent. (Author/IRT)

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PERCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE ADMINISTRATOR

by Alan F. Brown

Perception is a subtle thing - see how it dominates the behaviour of responsible people - and the rest of us - by causing them to see things as they are not seen in the eyes of the seen; yet the study of person perception is still a will o' the wisp, slithering off into another black vacuum just the moment you feel you have it within your grasp. It has a seductive quality that draws us into a phenomenological box from which one cannot withdraw: The popularity of Knots showing R.D. Laing wrestling with and fascinated by interpersonal chains like "he knows that she knows that he . . ." where could it go? - to "he acknowledges that she is aware that he understands that she disagrees with him"? Or into the comfort and security of Leibniz' windowless monad? Or into Bishop Berkeley's joyful journey into subjective idealism, causing Samuel Johnson to kick a stone with, "Sir, I repudiate him thus." But wouldn't you rather be led below the surface than go about kicking stones? Person perceptions are often thought to be distortions of fact, as with the fashionable wife at a cocktail party chiding her husband, "Darling, don't you think you've had enough to drink - your face is already getting a little blurred." But what is a fact? It is her perception of reality to which she responds, and we do likewise - whatever may be our own individual reasons for blurred vision. In some ways perhaps all perceptions are distortions to a degree. What makes possible mankind's universe of discourse is his willingness to accept consensus of distortion as fact.

Educational administrators are required to make decisions continuously, personnel decisions; they are deciding between persons with whom they work and whose careers are influenced by their decisions. They are deciding between

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persons whom they perceive in their own individual or collective ways. Be they committee strategies or simply intuitive hunches, the decisions are made when hiring, firing, promoting, transferring and for a vast array of career development activities such as appointment to ad hoc groups, task force projects, leadership activities, committee responsibilities as well as for tiny things that bye and bye accumulate. You may be interested in whether their criteria, and priorities of criteria they use in making these decisions, coincide with the criteria and priorities of their colleagues, of the director's office, of the teacher training college, or of conventional wisdom. Their criteria are those that count, all the rest is just talk. This interest therefore leads one to look at the ways the administrator's person perceptions develop; perhaps redevelopment, further development, or sharping and refining, can be planned for training programmes and professional development activities for school administrators. If these bring about sufficient understanding, there will be sufficient consensus - and "distortion" disappears.

If form follows function, let's see the form

We are much closer to reality in "what they perceive" than how they perceive it. If we are willing to assume the validity of the decisions made by those who actually make them (and who presumably know how), we therefore can place much security in the content of what they perceive at this time. Questions like what is the effective-rated teacher? or who's a good teacher? are questions I believe we can now easily answer operationally, so let us set them aside for a moment in order to look at the administrator's perceptual patterns.

There are four dimensions of person perceptions that lend themselves to our study and they received a little help from various sources, like Costello and Zalkind, Bruner, Kelly, and Daryl Bem. From our work to date we have found the perceptions of school principals to vary significantly and, to some extent

predictably, along these dimensions: complexity-simplicity, explicitness, decision-dominance, and role assumption. To amplify it a little, school principals who are making personnel decisions within members of staff perceive individual differences between them along four lines, showing varying degrees of --

1. Complexity-simplicity within their perceptual structure. That is some, like Mr. C we shall call him just now, will have a more simple structure using only one or two major notions under which individual differences are subsumed while others like our Mr. A will have four, six or more ways.

2. Explicitness in their views of their teachers. Mr. C again will appear unsure or ambivalent in descriptions of staff members while Mr. A is quite clear, more absolute. With him you know where you stand.

3. Decision-dominance when contemplating individual differences among members of staff. The individual characteristics of staff that most preoccupy Mr. C's perceptions may often not be the same ones that are most crucial to Mr. C when he makes personnel decisions. But they are, with Mr. A. It is as though all his interests were dominated by the need to make decisions.

4. Role assumption or seeing things through the eyes of the administrator. The pattern of person perceptions used by school principals will be about the same once they have fully assumed the administrative role and they will then tend to project administratively-relevant values into their perceptions.

When a researcher resorts to class labels like our Mr. A or C above, an excusable impression is that the point must be weak if it has to be that overdrawn. Perhaps, but my intent here was to assist your visual illustration: Figures 1 and 2 are scatter diagrams of two factors of leader behaviour from one study showing 170 school principals in the kind of leadership they were perceived by their staffs, and the letters refer to the quadrants. Quadrant A contains those seen by their staffs (through Stogdill's 100-item LBDQ-XII reduced by our study to the two factors shown) as those frequently performing behaviours showing production emphasis, initiating structure and role assertion, that is the

system type, or hard-liner. Quadrant C contains those seen by staff as strong on consideration, tolerance of freedom and tolerance of uncertainty - the person type, or helping person. But there is also a quadrant B containing principals viewed by staff as fairly strong on both A and C qualities but performing them somewhat more frequently, an integration type with high visibility. There is much evidence to show that Mr. B gets the best results, be it in terms of the teacher satisfaction shown in Figure 1 or in other indeces like school climate, introduction of innovations, degree of staff consensus, and even in school marks on external examinations. But back to their perceptual structure, one would find Mr. B in a happy middle position on complexity-simplicity. He is sufficiently well dedicated to his task to have developed a number of differentiating concepts but has kept them within manageable limits. Explicitness of perceptual differentiations is another dimension on which he is in mid-range; he is less likely to waffle when making personnel decisions but on the other hand he is not so explicit that people are seen only in a black and white dichotomy. Yet, he is an administrator and has become role conditioned as such; he therefore shares several interests and priorities with others who have assumed the role, particularly so in his perceptions of relations with other people.

A descent into the interpersonal underworld of administrators

Evidence for these simple generalizations is more fascinating than the generalizations themselves. The practice is to ask principals (or others) to think of the three strongest teachers on their current staffs, and also the three weakest, using their own criteria. Their criteria, or their priorities in operational terms, come out at the end of the process. We used a forced-comparisons method initiated originally but distantly from Kelly's role construct repertory grid, in which we ask them to consider

successive combinations of three teachers at a time and ask them to write down in what important way any two of them are alike enough to differentiate them from the third. This way one derives 18 separate perceptions that are used when making interpersonal similarities and differences among staff members - and that number just about exhausts anybody's repertory of interpersonal perceptions.

The rest is just a matter of questionnaire-administration. That is, the principal now has his own list of 18 items which he is now asked to use as his questionnaire for describing each of the six teachers (which are designated only by letters A, B, C, X, Y, Z) showing that they strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each item as describing each teacher.

By now we have all the necessary data to find out what are the actual priorities, and how are they used. By subtracting the summed XYZ ratings from the summed ABC ratings one has a crude index of how strong was that one item for that one principal in differentiating between strong and weak teachers. Thus if "warm and friendly attitude to pupils" and similar statements summed to 6 or 7 (on a 0-9 scale) we would take this to mean this concept has a high priority in this principal's criteria of good teachers because it has strong differentiating power; but if it, or others like it, showed a difference of only 2 or 3 it would signify low priority and fail to rank high in the priorities of that principal (and others of his group) when making personnel decisions on the "good teacher."

Procrustean Bed or Jerry-built House?

Actually the item-by-item interpretation is fun only in the opening stages and a classification system had to be constructed. Several have been attempted but the system, or "perceptual taxonomy", used in Table 1 is the one now in use. It developed with the help of several assistants at different times but I still am not certain whether it simply represents my own bed of Procrustes into which we fit all principals' statements - by now almost 4000 - or whether it just grew out of the meanings, connotations and connections that inhered in the original protocols. I prefer the latter, for it seemed to emerge that school administrators do see their staff members through four faces, or aspects: the individual, as a person, the teacher in his role relations with others, the teacher as a professional, and the teacher performing the direct task; each aspect seemed to have components and these are defined simply through providing you with examples on the second and third pages of Table 1, taken directly off the protocols.

Looking again at Table 1 you will notice that personality items in this study were mentioned almost as often as technology items (774 to 788), so, when making comparisons, the interpersonal perceptions of school principals frequently follow this pattern. But when it comes to making personnel decisions the pattern changes: the differentiating power of personality items was the lowest (43) and of technology items was the highest (62). One can take some reassurance from this. And though this data was the result from only one study those results are typical. My results from Scottish headmasters have yet to be analysed but from eyeball inspection of the first few, it looks much the same.

Perceptual Functioning of Different Administrators

Complexity-simplicity. A school principal who uses only one or two notions when describing his teachers' differences - for example, some rely almost entirely on "order" and "punctuality" or their synonyms and variations - would be said to have a simple structure of interpersonal perceptions. The term simple is too ambiguous; here it only means "very few dimensions to it." The intercorrelations between their items (18 items against a distribution of six ratings each) are high. Others show much more perceptual resourcefulness, showing what we call complexity or at least showing more multiplicity; they possess a wide variety of different dimensions along which interpersonal similarities and differences are arrayed. Their intercorrelation are low. The finding that intercorrelations usually range from .3 to .8 indicates a broad diversity in the perceptual functioning of school principals. There is a tendency for system-oriented administrators to have the lower intercorrelation; i.e. Mr. "A" has a multiplicity of perceptions.

Explicitness. When an administrator makes it quite clear that a term like "dedication to their pupils" distinguishes between his strong and weak staff members, his protocol shows it with high total scores, that is, high total of the separate differentiating scores for each 18 items. The research results themselves have been quite explicit here: the system-oriented principals (quadrant A, or "hard-liners") average a total score of 103 whereas the person-oriented principals average 60. Put another way, each item may have a differentiating power of from 0 to 9; Mr. A is likely to average 5.74 while Mr. C will average 3.36. Mr. B, the one seen more frequently to be performing leader behaviours of both styles, averages 4.48 or a full-scale score of 81.

Decision dominance, which I have sometimes called being "judgement-bound", is best exemplified where the system-oriented principal tends to perceive interpersonal similarities and differences within his staff only in the same priorities used in his personnel decisions. The frequency with which he uses person perceptions, like "willingness to cooperate with others" or "high measure of organisational ability" is well correlated with the differentiating power of those perceptions. His use of his repertory of interpersonal perceptions is dominated by his function of making decisions on the job. The person principal, on the other hand, seems to allow his perceptual repertory to roam over a number of things that interest him, perhaps personally, independent of his decision-making function as an administrator. Statistically this is well demonstrated in the correlations between "perceptual preoccupations", or frequency of mention of various categories of items, and "differentiating power" or the extent to which an item serves to differentiate between strong and weak teachers. With system-oriented principals ("A") this usually runs about .5 as compared with zero for person-oriented principals ("B"). (This difference, as all others mentioned, are statistically significant.). On Table 2 the difference is shown for one particular study. Of a small group similarly selected (i.e. above at least 1.25 standard deviations from both axes, Figures 1 and 2) from quadrant C it was -.28. The selected group from quadrant B show .07. But perhaps it can be seen more graphically in Figures 3 and 4. Figure 3 is the "preoccupations profile", or "this is a picture of what your principal is probably thinking and talking about" - his priorities of interests, while Figure 4 is "discriminating power" (differentiating power) or "but this is what counts when decisions are made" - his priorities for decisions. The Cronbach-Glaser D^2 test for profile similarity shows the system man's solid line profiles of Figures 3 and 4 to

be similar (as you can see by holding to the light); the others are not.

Role assumption. The kind of perceptions we tend to use is probably very much conditioned by the role we have assumed, and the degree to which we have assumed it over time. There are so many intriguing differences within the material so far presented that it is possible to overlook the very obvious similarities. Principals tend to see people through the eyes of principals, and this will affect their personnel decisions and selection recommendations more than nuances of differences within the fold. Look at Figure 3 again. All profiles are much similar (this was supported by D^2 test, earlier); their priorities of interests are those of the administrator. They are perceiving and talking about much the same things, even though they use different priorities for making decisions. But one time we also had a group of upward-mobiles, teachers who had not yet assumed the administrative role but were heading for it; each had already been marked for an early appointment and they were studying administration. Their preoccupations profile was much different from those of any group of principals. Furthermore, their protocols contained a large number of items we simply had to classify as "Miscellaneous".

Another manifestation of role assumption is seen in the content itself. Although many teacher training programmes and most inservice activities are heavily loaded with professional and teaching technology content, exactly one-half the perceptions used by principals are not (note aspects 3 and 4 of Table 1). Instead they perceive aspects of their interpersonal world that are important to them as administrators such as how people get along together, with the world and with the principal himself. Administrators, in short, project their own needs and concerns into their perceptions of staff. "Relations with the principal" or reasonably synonymous terms, has a strong degree of discriminating power for Mr. A, the system-oriented principal in

Table 2, obviously allowing his high degree of role assumption to affect his perceptual discriminations. The others, Mr. B, C, may give relations with the principal somewhat less power but they are nevertheless heavily preoccupied with this matter. In their priorities of interests we find relations with the principal second only to "sociality" with our Mr. C, and second only to "planning and organisation" with Mr. B.

Priorities for Decisions

It is now possible to write out an operational definition of the good teacher. The criteria have been identified and the priorities established, operationally. Although the priorities of any school principal's interests may not necessarily coincide with his priorities for decision-making, the "effective-rated teacher" must be defined as the latter. In general, then, the good teacher will be strongest, according to decision priorities in our studies, on (1) innovation or progressiveness, and, in descending sequence, (2) motivational teaching, (3) planning and organisation, (4) discipline and control, (5) diagnostic teaching, (6) drive, (7) commitment (8) participation in extracurricular and outside activities, (9) philosophical awareness, and (10) effective relations with fellow staff, with children, and with the principal himself. With less strength in affecting decisions, in descending order, are brightness, emotional security, professional knowledge, leadership influence and sociality.

The priorities for personnel decision making however manage to shift their positions from one sub-group to another. The hard-liner, or our Mr. A, tends to array his priorities (1) innovation, (2) discipline and control, (3) planning and organisation, (4) motivational teaching, (5) drive, (6) commitment, and (7) relations with the principal. The considerate or helping person (Mr. C) stresses (1) innovation, (2) professional knowledge,

(3) brightness, (4) diagnostic teaching, (5) motivational teaching, (6) planning and organisation, and (7) leadership or influence. The decision-maker strong on both the consideration and task factors (Mr. B) seems to favour philosophical awareness in his teachers but lumps the following quite closely together as priorities: innovation, commitment, motivational teaching, drive, outside participation, planning and organisation, and relations with the principal.

Toward Development

There is nothing unusual about there being a diversity of standards within a system; no doubt the system benefits in the long run from the presence within it of a multiplicity of criteria, priorities and operational definitions. Of course it can be frustrating to the teacher who is seeking recognition and who must benefit or suffer from the decisions of masters who conceal the rules which are of themselves inconsistent from one to the other -- but teachers are resourceful. What the school system is more interested in has to do with where the standards arose from, where did they grow out of, what made them disparate, and especially how can one get some leverage upon the growth and development of these.

It is too easy to look back at the above pages and answer: the perceptual diversity arises out of their leadership styles. Sure, see how when you can reduce a mass into a set of personality categories you can predict their behaviour? Yes, but even if it were accurate, a conclusion that "style of leadership" determines perceptual behaviour would offer a bleak prognosis. Try turning it about. Perhaps perceptual patterns determine leadership mode. Certainly one would prefer it that way for it offers greater opportunity for the professional development of school administrators. Interpersonal perceptions having been learned can be unlearned and relearned. There are probably more

levers to work on than the four identified here -- complexity-simplicity, explicitness, decision dominance and role assumption -- and certainly also one can find near synonyms for these phenomena within the perception literature (try projections, halos, stereotyping, attributions, assimilations) but these are four that can be worked on directly in administrator training programmes.

Alan F. Brown

TABLE 1

A PATTERN FOR CLASSIFYING OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF A GOOD TEACHER

N = 156, Mean P.D. = 80, f = 2,808 statements

		f	Frequency in %	Power
Aspect 1	**Individuality: Personality (the teacher as a person, an individual, without necessary link with the structural or professional context).**			
elements:				
1.1	Brightness	118	4.2	47
1.2	Emotional Security	174	6.2	45
1.3	Sociality	129	4.6	32
1.4	Drive	149	5.3	54
1.5	Influence	66	2.4	34
1.6	Miscellaneous	138	4.9	40
		774	27.6	43
Aspect 2	**Relations with Others: Interactions (the teacher in his role relations with other persons or groups or institutions, apart from actual classroom work)**			
elements:				
2.1	Children	222	7.9	48
2.2	Staff	87	3.1	49
2.3	Principal	251	8.9	47
2.4	Participation in Extra C, community and profession	73	2.6	52
		633	22.5	48
Aspect 3	**Professionalization (the teacher as educator, member of the profession)**			
elements:				
3.1	Commitment	268	9.5	54
3.2	Philosophical Awareness	61	2.2	52
3.3	Knowledge	206	7.3	45
		535	19.0	50
Aspect 4	**Technologies of Teaching (the teacher as teacher in the performance of the task, classroom teaching)**			
elements:				
4.1	Planning and organisation	281	10.0	61
4.2	Innovation	94	3.3	71
4.3	Discipline or control	191	6.8	60
4.4	Diagnostic Teaching	88	3.1	56
4.5	Motivational Teaching	134	4.8	64
		788	28.0	62
5.	Miscellaneous	78	2.8	40
		2808	100.0%	

typical positive/negative examples follow . . .

Table 1, page 2 (cont'd)

1. Elements of Individuality Aspect.

1.1 Brightness. Stimulating, creative, resourceful, original, imaginative, witty/uninteresting, dull uninspiring.

1.2 Emotional Security. Emotionally stable, calm, cheerful, confident, easy going/easily frustrated, sensitive, depressed, indecisive, impatient.

1.3 Sociality. Sociable, friendly, extroverted, talkative, considerate/not compassionate, self-centred, reserved.

1.4 Drive. Ambitious, energetic, capable of strong motivation/lacks drive, "let others do it" attitude.

1.5 Leadership. Dominant personality, dynamic and effective leader, authoritarian, persuasive, outspoken/follower, timid, easily led.

1.6 Miscellaneous. Good personality, character, sense of humour, specific interests/prudish, prejudiced.

2. Elements of Interactions Aspect.

2.1 Teacher to children. Rapport, respect, confidence of pupils, liking for children/does not have cooperation, has "favourites", does not accept children as individuals.

2.2 Teacher to staff. Promotes good staff morale, skill in human relations, cooperates with staff, works well in team/poor social relations, withdrawn, unable to cooperate, cliquish.

2.3 Teacher to principal. Responsible, dependable, cooperative, open to suggestions, supportive, reliable/critical, does not complete work, reports not on time, does not share in projects, inclined to disregard regulations.

2.4 Participation in extra-curricular, community and profession. Interest in school, community and parents, professional developments/little outside interest, does not consider further qualifications necessary.

3. Elements of Professionalization Aspect.

3.1 Professional Commitment. Enthusiasm and zest for teaching, conscientious/lax, teaching not taken seriously, "nine-to-four" attitude.

3.2 Philosophical Awareness. Broad goals, concerned about broader aims of education, good grasp of the job/lack of awareness of larger goals, rigid concern for trivia.

Table 1, page 3 (cont'd)

Elements of Professionalization Aspect (cont'd)

3.3 Professional Knowledge. Thorough knowledge of curriculum, teaching methods, effective follow-up aids, strong background, professional training, master of subject matter, improving qualifications/poor master of subject field, inexperienced, cultural background not broad enough, not familiar with new methods.

4. Elements of Technologies of Teaching Aspect.

4.1 Planning and organisation. Good planning and preparation, systematic, methodical and thorough, efficient and orderly use of classroom time/weak classroom routines, lack of planning and preparation.

4.2 Innovation. Eager to accept new programmes, willing to try new methods, adaptable, progressive, inventive/set in his thinking, stays in a rut, dislikes change, tradition bound.

4.3 Discipline or Control. Good discipline, reasonably firm, consistent, pleasant but firm, master of the situation/poor disciplinarian, too severe, too lenient, oblivious to noise.

4.4 Diagnostic Teaching. Attention to individual differences, aware of students' background, achievement demands are realistic for children, systematic diagnostic work is done/unrealistic about individual differences, expects too much of children, lacks insight into student needs, impatient with low achievement.

4.5 Motivational Teaching. Motivates, inspires, stimulates good discussion and class participation, challenges, enriches/drab presentation, vague, lacks ability to maintain interest, sticks strictly to guide books.

TABLE 2

DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THE CONTENT OF ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS FOR EACH OF THREE SUB-GROUPS (N = 45)

General Class and Components	System-Oriented Principals (N=16)		Person-Oriented Principals (N=13)		High on Both System and Person Orient. (N=16)	
	Preocc.	Power*	Preocc.	Power*	Preocc.	Power*
Aspect 1: Individuality: Personality	26.5%	48	33.7%	48	30.4%	43
Elements 1.1 Brightness	3.5%	44	5.1%	62	6.9%	41
1.2 Emotional Security	4.2%	45	5.6%	41	5.5%	38
1.3 Sociability	4.5%	43	11.1%	44	5.9%	35
1.4 Drive	6.3%	58	4.7%	43	3.8%	55
1.5 Influence	3.1%	33	2.1%	53	2.4%	53
1.6 Miscellaneous	4.9%	52	5.1%	52	5.9%	45
Aspect 2: Relations with Others: Interactions	21.4%	50	22.3%	38	22.2%	51
Elements 2.1 Children	8.3%	50	6.0%	52	5.9%	47
2.2 Staff	3.1%	42	1.7%	41	4.2%	49
2.3 Principal	6.9%	55	10.3%	28	9.3%	53
2.4 Participation in Community and Profession	3.1%	44	4.3%	42	2.8%	55
Aspect 3: Professionalization	20.5%	5.1	18.7%	56	16.7%	56
Elements 3.1 Commitment	10.1%	57	8.5%	52	5.9%	55
3.2 Philosophical awareness	2.8%	27	1.7%	47	4.2%	78
3.3 Knowledge	7.6%	53	8.5%	62	6.6%	43
Aspect 3: Technologies of Teaching	29.5%	60	22.7%	54	27.3%	54
Elements 4.1 Planning and Organisation	12.5%	59	8.1%	54	11.1%	54
4.2 Innovation	4.2%	67	2.1%	65	4.8%	59
4.3 Discipline or Control	3.8%	63	5.6%	44	4.8%	52
4.4 Diagnostic Teaching	1.7%	54	4.3%	61	2.4%	47
4.5 Motivational Teaching	7.3%	58	2.6%	56	4.2%	55
5. Miscellaneous	2.1%	46	2.6%	54	3.1%	35
Correlation: Preoccupations X Power	.47		-.28		-.07	

*Standard scores scaled to mean 50, standard deviation 10.

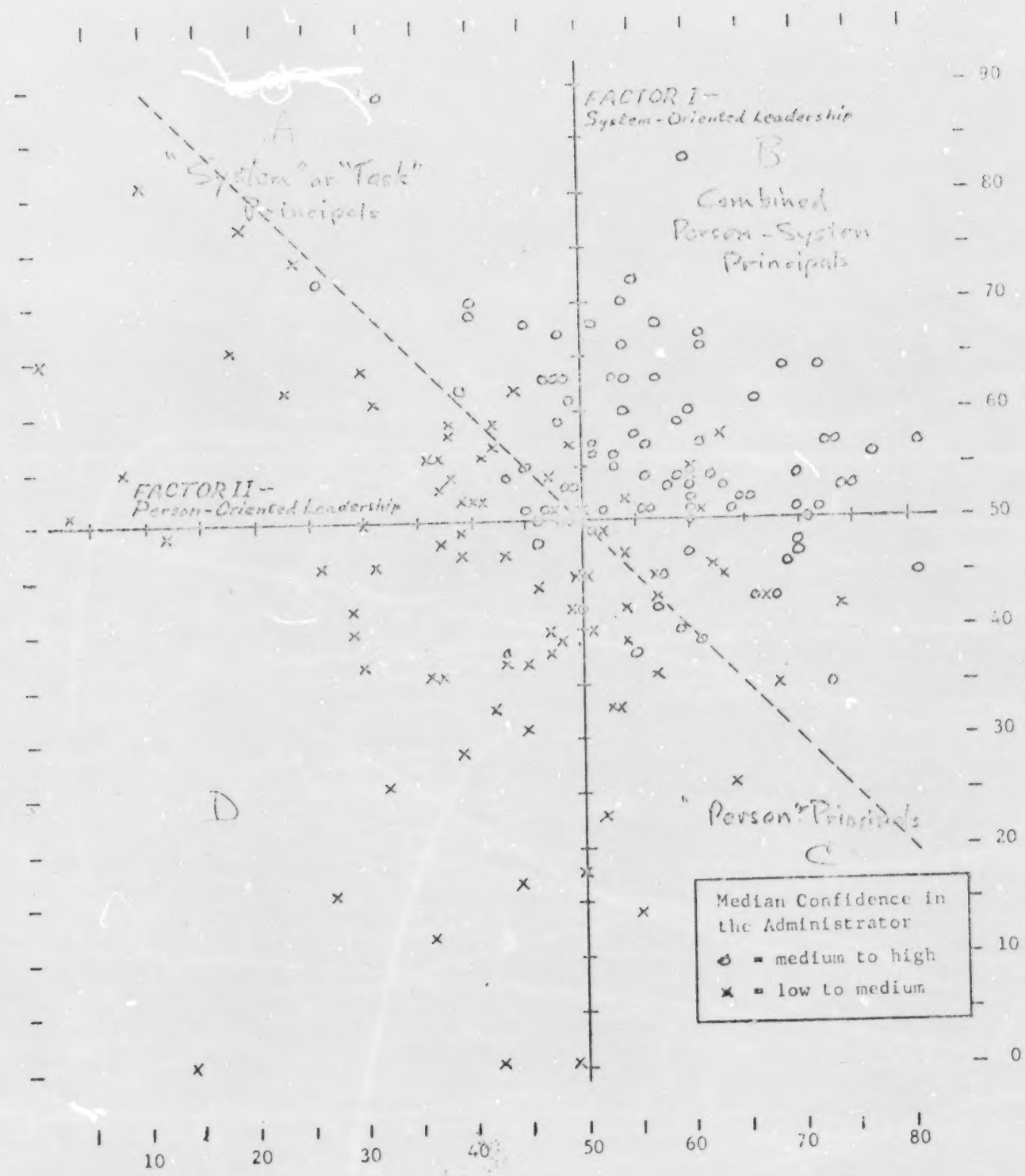


Figure 2

DISTRIBUTION OF 170 ADMINISTRATORS ON TWO FACTORS OF ASCRIBED LEADER BEHAVIORS ILLUSTRATING LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE IN THE ADMINISTRATOR

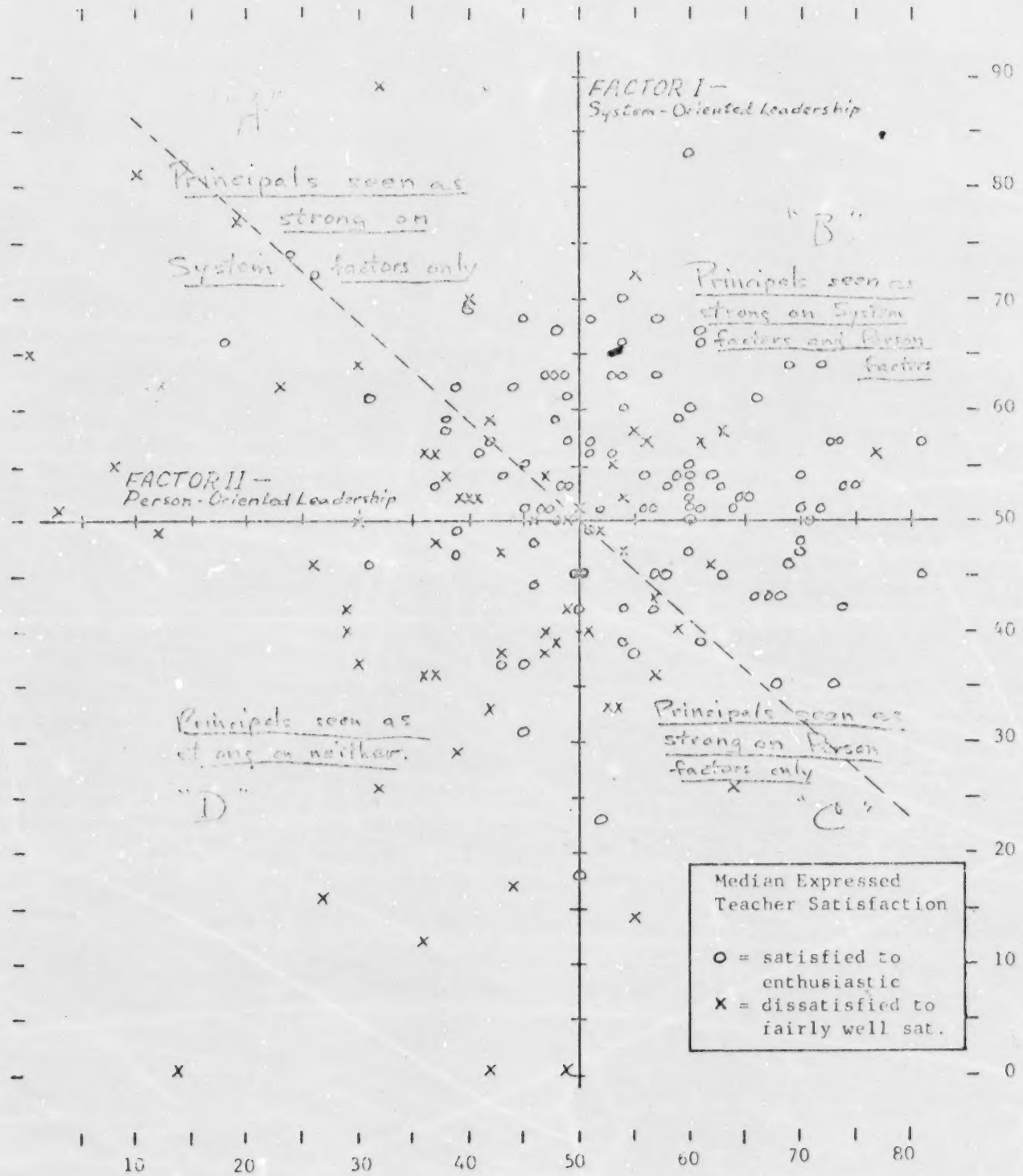
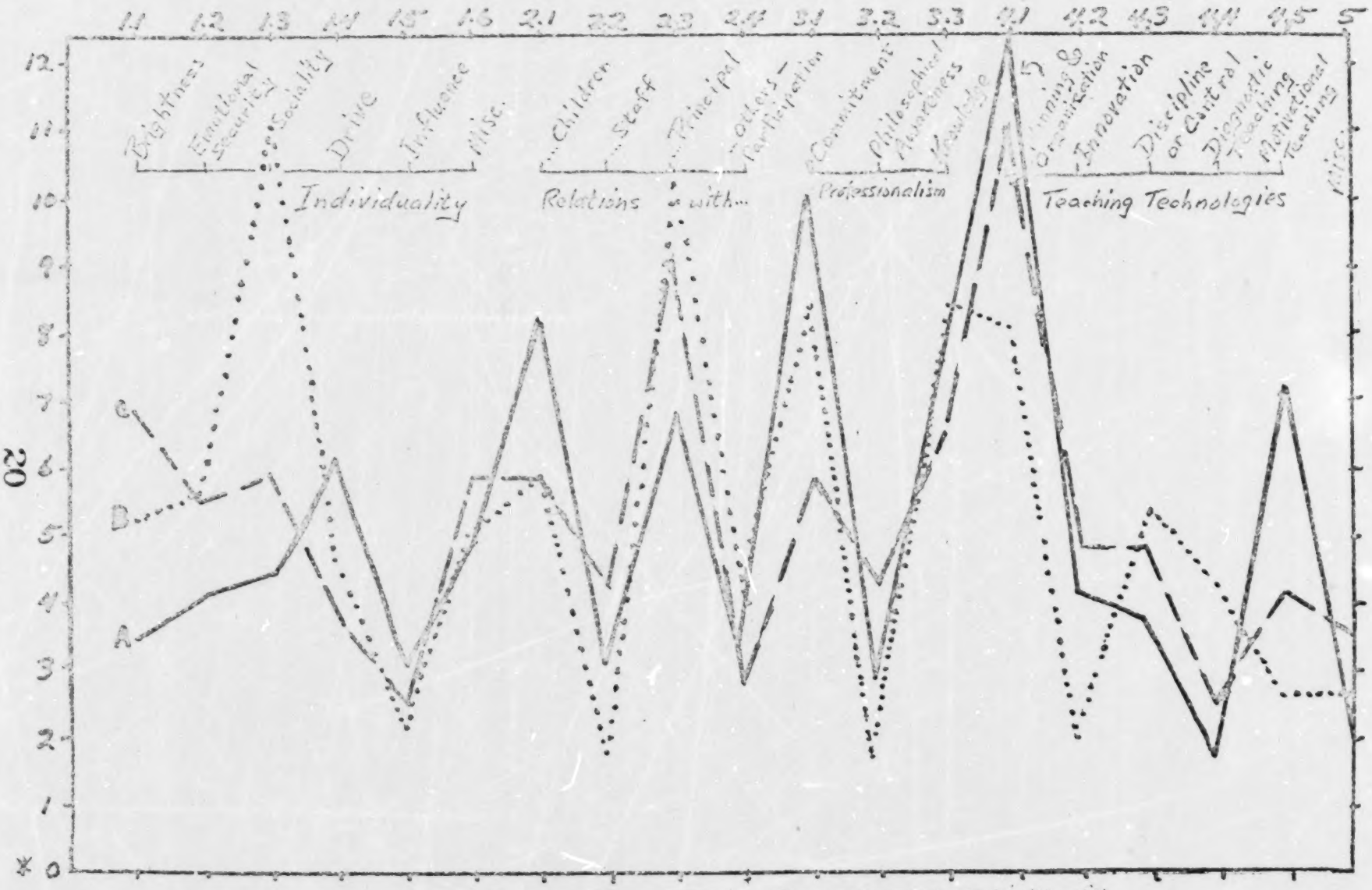


Figure 1

DISTRIBUTION OF 170 ADMINISTRATORS ON TWO FACTORS OF ASCRIBED LEADER BEHAVIORS ILLUSTRATING LEVEL OF TEACHER SATISFACTION

Figure 3

PERCEPTUAL PREOCCUPATIONS OF ADMINISTRATORS ASKED TO CONSIDER 18 COMBINATIONS OF STAFF MEMBERS



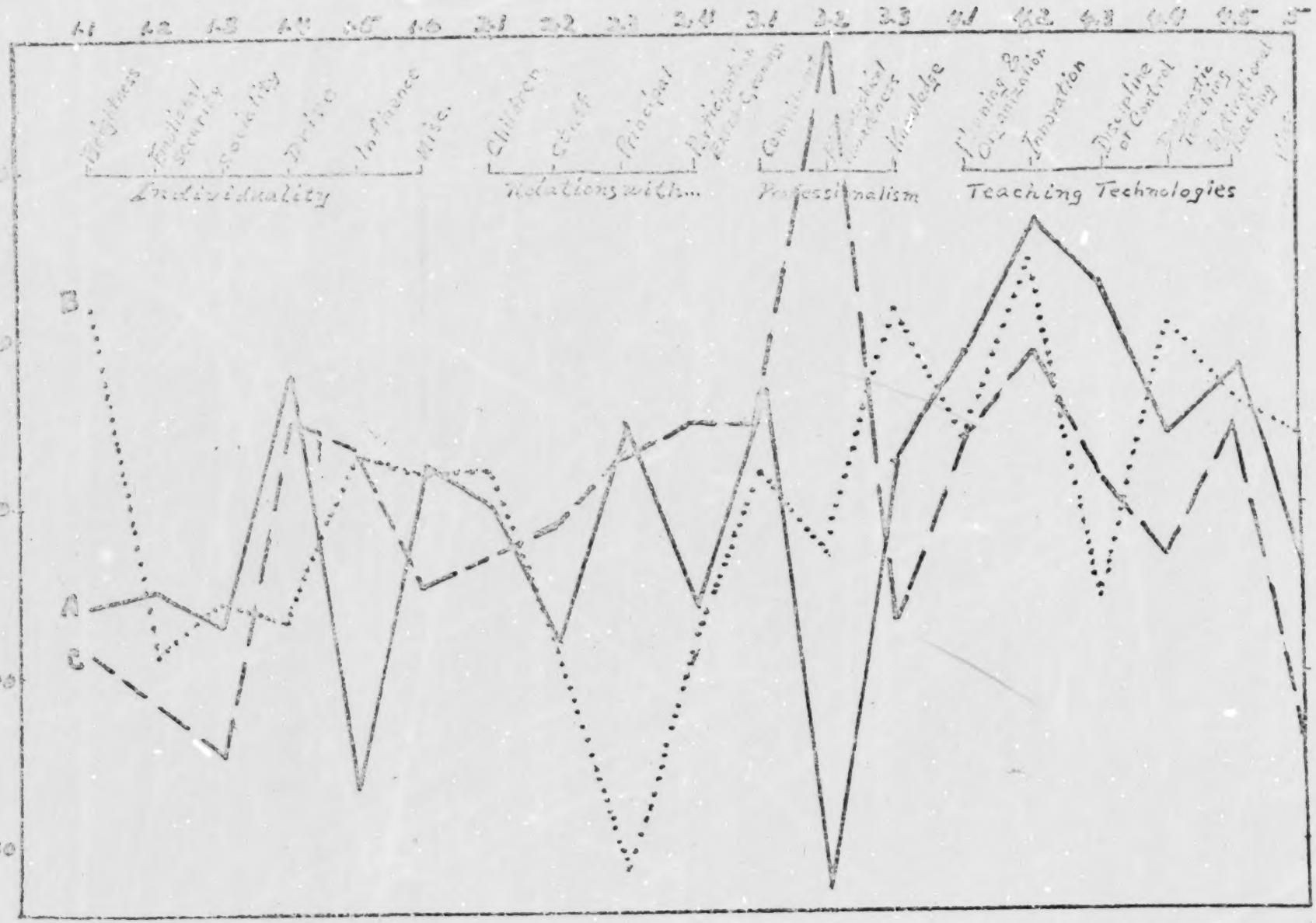
* per cent of total number of mentions

A - system-oriented (N = 16)
B - person-oriented (N = 13)
C - high on both (N = 16)

Figure 3

Figure 4

DISCRIMINATING POWER OF ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS



* Standard scores
$\bar{X} = 50$, $s = 10$

A - system-oriented (N = 16)
B - person-oriented (N = 13)
C - high on both (N = 16)

Figure 4